



1983-04-02

Pertelote | April 1983

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PERITOTE

A
Literary
Magazine

JACKSONVILLE
STATE
UNIVERSITY

April 1983

The Supermarket Kid

By KIMRA TRAYNOR

*There had been another angry scene:
my mother screaming at me . . . and me thinking
that I wished she were dead, dead, dead, and
out of my life.*

I hate going to the damn grocery store, I think darkly to myself as we drive down the road. There had been another angry scene: my mother screaming at me that I was a lazy self-centered child, and me thinking that I wished that she were dead, dead, dead, and out of my life. In the end, I had consented to go with her to the grocery store- but only because I knew that I would be grounded for the rest of my life if I didn't. My mother is such a bitch. A grown woman, thirty-eight years old, and she can't do anything on her own. I glance out of the corner of my eye at her. Her thin lips are pressed together in an angry line as if someone was trying to push some bad-tasting medicine into her mouth. Her black, uncontrolled curls fly about the car from the wind. I hate having the window open. I hate my hair flying into my mouth and the taste of it- like wet sand. She loves it. Says it gives her a sense of freedom. Right. As if the taste of wet hair is uplifting or something. Her murky brown-green eyes turn towards me now.

"We're here." She states, daring me to challenge her.

"No joke," I flip at her, smiling wryly as her cheeks flush pink. That annoys me. Everytime I get in a good remark, her cheeks have to turn all pink like that. My father says she is sensitive. I know she practices....late at night when everyone is asleep. She sits in front of a mirror and wills her cheeks to flush like that....she does it- I know it- just to get me. I grab the nearest cart and run crazily into the store.

"Fifteen years old - you act more like you are four."

"Drop dead." I mutter.

"What? Allison Susan Johnson...what did you say? Did you say something?"

She heard me. I swerve dangerously close to a display area and feel a wave of satisfaction when my mother has to pick up the box of Nilla Wafers I had knocked down.

"Do we have a coupon for hotdogs? I could swear I had cut one out." She is digging furiously in her oversized handbag, pulling coupons out left and right in search of the hotdog coupon. Oh my God, I think, I am going to die of embarrassment. Her and those damn embarrassing coupons. No bargain is too small of a bargain for my mother. Why, last month we had even used generic toothpaste.

"It's just the same as the other-only with a different package," she had said at the time, her muddy eyes clouding with pain.

"Then why can't we get the other?" I had demanded, staring in disgust at the plain white tube with black letters which said simply: "Toothpaste." Creative Packaging.

"WE saved 23 cents by buying that brand," she had said.

Oh well, the whole thing is simply too depressing to think about. She is still scratching around in her purse, and things are beginning to spill out. Oh hell, I knew it. I scurry to the floor to pick up her compact, a dried out piece of Juicy Fruit gum, and a broken pen before anyone sees us. I pull my hair back from my face and stand up, thrusting her personal belongings back at her. I quickly glance around the store,



"What's your name...?" he whines at me, tilting his dirty little face to one side.

hoping no one important sees us. OH no. That little punk. I swear he must follow me to the grocery store. His light red hair sticks up as if in protest to gravity. His jeans, as usual, are filthy - covered with mud. The Supermarket Kid, I call him. He is always here. His mother has her usual harried look - not that I blame her, a kid like that would

boys just hate to go to the store; he probably got bored. Thanks for coming with me; you know I hate to come here alone." She giggles nervously, her large eyes searching mine for some signs of love. I stare coolly at her- determined not to break. We are nearing the health and beauty aid section. My favorite.

*"Oh my God, I think I'm going to
die of embarrassment. No bargain
is too small for my mother."*

drive anyone crazy. I hope that he doesn't spot me. He does.

"What's your name...?" He whines at me, tilting his dirty little face to one side.

"Allison." This is for my mother. She is watching me; making sure that I am nice to the boy. If I am not, I suppose I will face capital punishment in the car later on - so I am nice. Just wait til we're alone, kid; I think, and smile wickedly at the brat.

"Alllllllllison," he pauses; picking his nose. What a revolting kid. "What's your momma's name...?"

"Bitch" I want to reply, but instead I offer, "Mona."

"Oh." He pops that old finger into his mouth and is off in search of new conquests. Boy, I'd like to strangle that kid. I feel eyes on me.

"Allison, I am glad you were nice to that boy. He really isn't so bad, you know. Little

"I seriously doubt that your brother would ask for creme rinse. If he did, I would tell him the same thing I am telling you right now. No. N-O. Am I making myself perfectly clear?"

That's another thing that bothers me about my mother. She is always spelling things. When she wants me off the phone, she screams up the stairs "O-F-F: Off." It's really degrading to someone my age to have my mother spelling at me all of the time. I watch my mother hurry down the aisle, picking up Tampax and Dial soap. She is wearing her cut-off shorts which come nearly to her knees. Tiny purple lines mark her legs as if grape juice has made little rivers on the white, white flesh. I quickly drop the conditioner into the cart-arranging it under some bargain-brand strawberry perserves and Charmin toilet paper. (My mother draws the line at bargain toilet paper - only the best for her family in this area.) Possibly she will never notice, what with the confusion of finding the proper coupons and informing the cashier of the sales and all. I smile to myself and steer the cart to my mother's side.

"Where have you been, I have been holding all of this stuff for hours," she says dramatically, dropping her load of personal hygiene articles into the cart. She tucks a curl behind her ear as I sigh: the mistreated child.

I look ahead of us and see a huge black lady. Her massive chest heaves- apparently from pushing her cart. Her hair looks like my mother's, I notice, except this lady's has been tipped with grey. Sad, sad, brown eyes like tootsie pops peer out at the world. Her face is lined. Great flaps of loose skin hang down from her chin. She is wearing a calico dress which is pink encrusted with tiny yellow flowers. Her swollen feet are stuffed into orthopedic shoes which have the appearance of being three or four sizes too small. I smile at her, but either she doesn't notice or she thinks I feel sorry for her. I don't think that I do- but one never knows - I could. Suddenly, I see a flash of red hair. OH no, not again. The little terror is approaching the black lady. He pulls on the hem of her dress, looking earnestly up into her time-worn face. I edge closer, wanting to hear.

"What's your name?" His red and blue striped T-shirt is a marked contrast to the chocolate of her arm.

"Emma." She does not look up from the meat counter. She carefully chooses the leanest hamburger and places it gently into her cart. The Supermarket Kid is tugging at his ear, his lips pursed.

"What's your momma's name?" I am humming to the muzak's version of "Tie a Yellow Ribbon" as I wait for her reply. The little boy is dancing from one foot to another: impatient for an answer. The black lady spins about quicker than seems possible on her swollen feet. Her candy brown eyes burn into those of the child.

"My momma's dead." She speaks in an even, emotionless monotone. The Supermarket Kid lets out a sudden squeak. He turns and runs to his mother. My heart stops for an instant as I scan the aisle for my mother: my own precious mother, and I too hurry to the safety of her side.

"Mom....." I begin, slowly, smiling eagerly up at her.

"No."

"But I didn't say anything yet. You are so suspicious. All I want is some of this new conditioner that makes your hair a magnet for men," I say, gesturing towards a pink plastic bottle.

"I said no, and I meant it. Can't you hear?" My mother wasn't looking at me as she said this so I gave her the finger behind her back. She swerves around suddenly as if those eyes in the back of her head which all mothers seem to have had detected my middle finger pointing in her direction.

"Whhhhyyyyy not?" I whine, "all of the other girls' mothers buy them anything they want. You are absolutely the meanest. I bet if John wanted some you would buy him some."



Gilbraltor

Few waves that cross the inland sea
Do more than cut its surface.
And many who begin as free
Become captives of the coasts and bays.
The few who struggle to hold their crests aloft
Often lose momentum, often stall.
While too many who see the journey through
Have nothing above to show at all.
So few see the end of the gilded voyage.
The courses in which so many falter.
So few break through to the open sea.
Beneath the promised face of Gilbraltor.

JEFFREY W. STEWART

Photo by Tim Whit

Banana on an Ego Trip

I would untie your shoe,
But they have no laces.
So I lie here on your rug,
Making funny faces.
You may say to me, "you're strange",
Or "man did you really flip",
But I'm not strange at all.
I'm just a Banana on an ego trip.

I could sing to you a lullaby
But I don't want to sleep.
So I'll write you a poem,
A thought of mine for you to keep.
Now, I may not be a wise man
But I don't want to be
I'm just having lots of fun
Being free, being me.
So when people think
I'm not who I should be,
I simply smile and tell them
I'm a Banana in a peanut tree.

Some people live and are lucky
Some are lucky to be alive.
But as for me, I am the latter,
I'm a Banana on a power drive.
There is a simple rule to follow,
On reality lose your grip.
Be like me, be free
Be a Banana on an ego trip.

Though we may not have money
At least we have appeal.
There is nothing artificial
We Bananas are for real.
So when upon reality
You start to lose your grip,
Just smile and say, "Hey
I'm just a Banana on an ego trip."
I feel like just pretending
Like when I was a child
To some that may sound boring.
But with me I just go wild.

I sometimes wish that I could be
Still hanging on that tree
Beside my lifetime friends
From the peanut gallery.
All good things don't end
My friends will still be friends,
And my love will still be my love
When each new day begins.
So pardon me for staring
But I really didn't see.
I was just daydreaming
About peanuts, Bananas, and me.

STEVE HOWSE

But The Memory Retains

By ANNA BERSANI

This gray sleepy weather brings back a lot of memories; the beginning of the winter, dead leaves fluttering down from the large plane trees on the avenue, long endless succession of cloudy misty days.

Winter. The drizzle falling all day long gives a wet glow to everything around. In the rain the noise of the cars is different, almost gentle, softened. It is not too cold yet; it's only a series of sleeping depressing days. Through the window of my room the house in front is deformed by the rain-drops that slowly roll down the glass and constantly change shape.

Winter. School, only one block away. Sometimes it got so dark in the morning that we had to turn the light on. Then lazy afternoons sitting home quietly, with the comfort of an electric lamp. Hot milk poured into the usual red cups, the ones that we still have, warm apple cakes, songs for children in French; and outside in the darkness the wet streets are perfect mirrors for the vivid neon lights.

My father used to come home from work when we children were almost ready to go to bed. He often brought us little presents, like toys or books.

While I was walking back through the corridor my stomach was getting stiff and I was very scared.

Books. They meant everything to me. I used to sit at a big wood table with a blanket on my knees and read one book a day. Now the smell of the beeswax and the one of the pages are blended forever.

Then the weekend, with the same sleepy, foggy weather. Every Sunday we went to see my grandfather who lived alone in the big family house in a country town. The ride seemed endless to me, always so impatient to get there, but every time we arrived I didn't want to get out of the car anymore and leave my dreams in such a brusque and painful way, my long dreams rocked by the monotonous noise of the car in the rain.

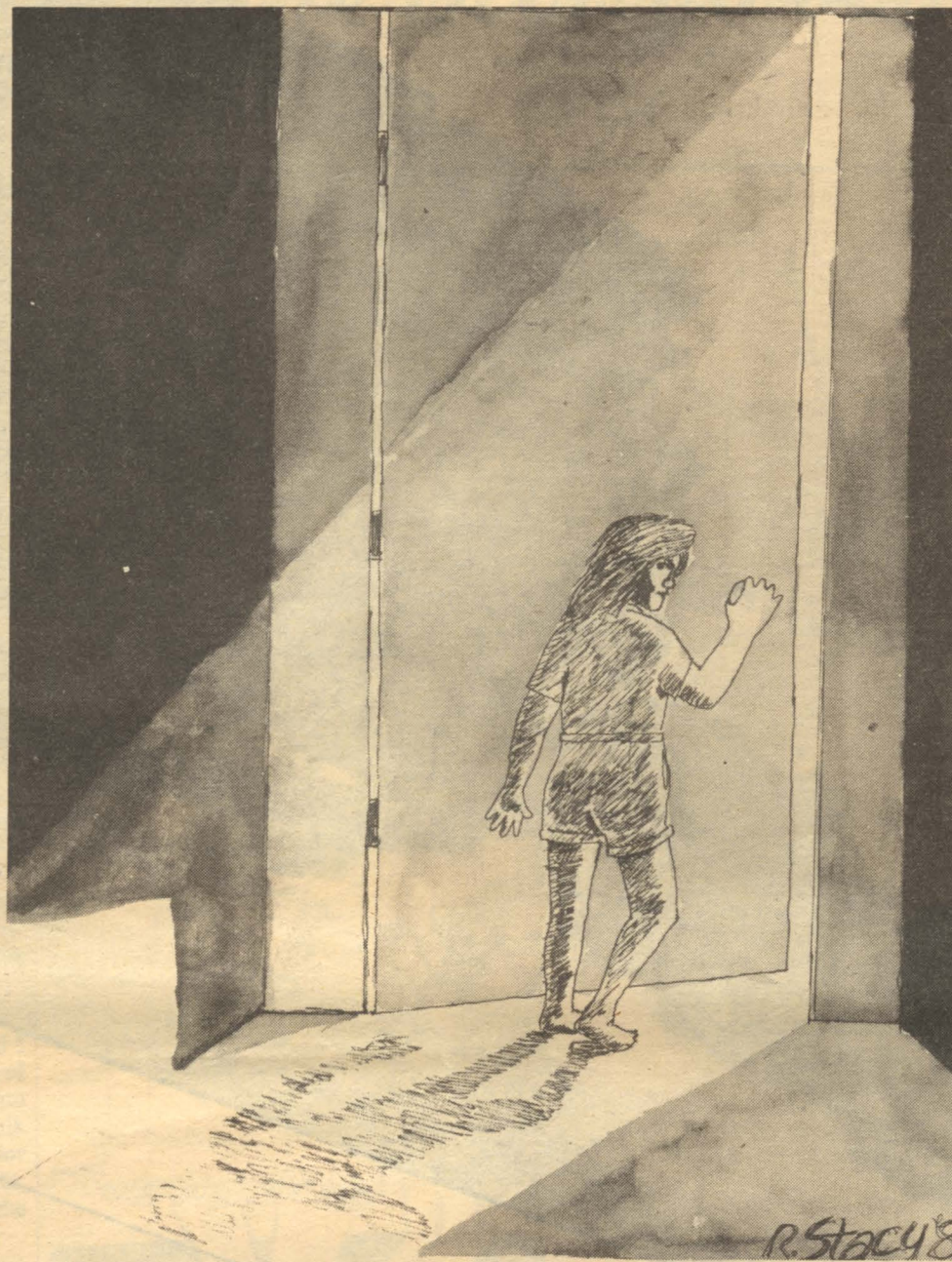
Sunday. First the mess in that huge old gothic church full of people and statues, tapestries, tombs and offerings, and always so dark, too big for any light. The steps of the columns were almost as big as I was, and the jungle of people's legs always kept me close to the step, scared to lose the security of my parents' sight.

Next to the statue of an angel killing a snake, there was a big one of Saint Ann. They used to show it to me, proudly, but I just hated my name to come from such a scary figure.

I loved to go to church, though, because we went to the main service, the long one, and I had a whole hour for myself, myself only, no stupid questions to answer, a whole hour to plunge into my dreams.

Sunday. Sundays for me still smell like church, a mixture of incense and candle wax, or like roast beef and soup, or like the terrible tobacco of my grandfather's cigarettes. He always smoked one just after supper, before dozing off on the armchair for the two o'clock nap.

That was the moment I had been waiting for for so long, without letting anybody know. That was the beginning of my world. The edge between the two was getting thinner and thinner, more and more transparent.



My grandfather's eyelids were getting heavy and finally he closed them. At that moment my magic world was there, waiting for me.

Everybody else was sleeping in some of the rooms. I was alone. Every door of the house so large and full of mystery was now open, open to me. Walking carefully on the creaking wood floor I went into the pink bathroom. During the last months I had already searched in every single cupboard or drawer in the house looking for books and toys, or just to discover something about the past life of my family.

My father has three brothers and nobody there ever threw anything away. I knew exactly where I could find any kind of different old objects: their Mardi Gras costumes and masks, their dusty and smelly school books, or the family pictures at least sixty years old. I knew that house better than my grandfather did. In one of the bedrooms there was a big heavy cupboard full of old suits and neck and bow ties, another with piles of dusty boxes filled with handmade nativity scenes and figurines. My father and his brothers used to build their own toys out of wood, and everything was still there.

In the hall a large seat-locker was the coffer of all sorts of different games. I used to look into the boxes and unfold the papers carefully, trying not to make too much noise; they were yellowish and smelled like dust. I always could tell when people were getting up because the old wooden floor used

to creak real loud, but every time I heard a noise my heart started to hammer.

That day I had immediately gone into the bathroom and I was standing still in front of a door.

My grandfather was a doctor and was still working. To enter his office from inside the house, one had to go through a door in one of the bedrooms; behind that, there was a cold room full of piles and piles of medicine boxes, I have never seen that many anywhere else. I had been in that room with my parents sometimes; there were also crates of potatoes and apples, bottles of wine and I knew that the Christmas presents were there long before Christmas. The smell was a funny mixture of pills, apples and cold.

Sometimes I had also been in my grandfather's surgery with him. There were two rooms: one was where he studied and one where he visited. The large desk always full of books, magazines and white sheets of paper for the prescriptions, was fascinating, and my dream was to be able to look everywhere in those two rooms on my own, instead of hearing my mother's worried voice: "Don't touch, Anna, please, don't touch anything!"

That day very carefully I opened the door in the bathroom. I had always thought it was a closet; instead I had discovered that a little narrow corridor was behind it. It was only the second time that I went through it and I was even more excited than the first one. I hoped I could have enough courage to go further.

The same door at the end of the corridor led into the two funny rooms that I had discovered during my first visit and which I had never seen before. The large floor-tiles were pale blue, maroon and black. Chairs and benches were arranged along the walls and magazines and newspapers were casually piled up on little tables.

There were two more doors, two closed and mysterious doors. I slowly reached for one, holding my breath. I put my hand on the cold metal handle. My heart was hammering; I knew that I was committing a terrible crime. I carefully turned the handle and... and it was locked. I relaxed. I had to try again with the other door, and that was unlocked.

I closed my eyes and took a very deep breath. I was about to enter my grandfather's office without him and without my parents, alone, as I had always dreamed.

My first steps there were very insecure, I hardly dared to look around, but then I started to touch everything I could. I was incredibly happy; it was like entering one of

I was fascinated, especially by such spooky things as the skull that could open and close its mouth."

the pirate ships of my books. A dream. There was a glass ball full of water and a pedal to turn on the tap. I had never seen anything like that; I washed my hands at least five times before trying something else.

The x-ray machine was there too, but there was no way that I could stand behind the screen and see my bones at the same time, so I decided to bring a mirror in the future.

I tried the little bed and the stretcher and searched in every cupboard and drawer there. I was fascinated, especially by such spooky things as the skull that could open and close its mouth as my father had shown me once. I found boxes with teeth of everybody: my uncles, my cousins and mine too. I looked for my appendix; I had heard that it was somewhere in a jar, but I had no idea if it was true or only one of my father's jokes.

I didn't know what time it was and after a while I slowly began to get nervous because I knew I had to leave. I feared to stay longer and I feared to go back and find somebody looking for me. I finally turned, silent and careful, trying to leave everything in the right place.

While I was walking back through the corridor, my stomach was getting stiff and I was very scared. I stopped and listened for any noise from behind the bathroom door. Everything was still quiet.

I went back and sat at the table next to my grandfather with a book in my hands and a terribly exultant smile on my face, too excited to read and already thinking about the next time.

++++

Now my grandfather has moved out, the house doesn't exist anymore and I hate thinking that that world is gone forever and will come back to me only in some kind of gray sleepy day, when the rain is falling quietly and the noise of the cars is softened, almost gentle.



Never be so fascinated with seeing
how many grains of sand you can
get to slip through your
fingers that you miss
the one that could
have become your
most precious
pearl.



LAURA DEAN BROWN

Weathered Love

You could be the weather man,
tempting me with sunshine,
promising clear skies.
Smiling all the
while.



But-

Temperatures drop
and down comes snow.

and
after
your so-called
mistake,
you're back-
grinning
and
saying,
"Oh well, no picnics today"



I can laugh at
your stupidity.

I had
never
packed a picnic-
Why, when
even in the
spring
I had expected
snow?



AMY BLISS MASON

Quilts and the Hollywood Palace

By Fusie Irwin

My grandmother lived next to us on N. Court Street and was often elected to sit with the youngest member of our family, which just happened to be me. I had two older brothers and one older sister, all of whom had girlfriends or parties or other grown-up places to go on the weekend. It was my belief that they had all the fun, while I had to stay at home with Grandmother. I was even barred on the weekends from the skating rink my parents owned because it was too crowded on Friday and Saturday nights. I often wondered why I was taught to skate at the age of two if I couldn't go and skate whenever I wanted to.

Being five years old and feeling abandoned by your family can be a very lonely situation, but my grandmother always managed to lift my spirits and make me feel just as grown-up as my sister and brothers. Upon my arrival at her house, she would always say that she'd rather stay home with me and have a "party" just for the two of us than to be anywhere else.

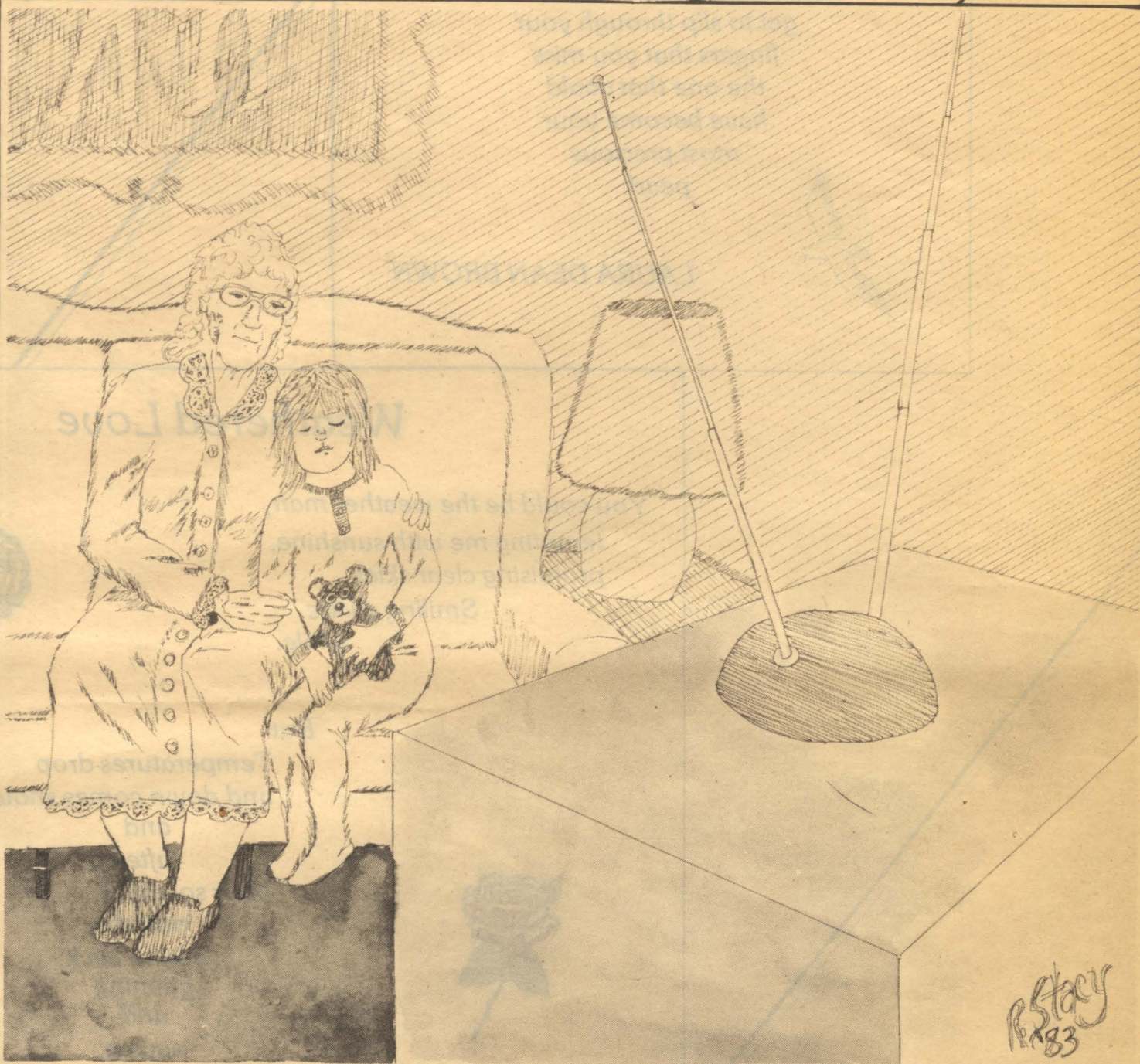
Although many Saturday nights have passed since those spent with my grandmother, they are as vivid and as comforting as they were then.....

It was late on a Saturday afternoon and I had just been deposited in the front yard of my grandmother's house. She came out onto the porch and asked if I were ready to walk to the store to get "a piece of chocolate" for our party. She was referring to her favorite, a Hershey's chocolate bar, but I knew she would let me choose whatever I wanted.

As we walked up to the rock store, the late August sun had warmed the pavement and it felt good under my bare feet. Tar bubbles brought to the surface by the heat were irresistible, and besides, I knew that when we got back home, Grandmother would gently scrape the tar from my feet with her kitchen knife and make me promise not to step in the tar again, even though she knew I would.

By the time we got back from the store, it was too dark to play outside so I came in to help Grandmother with whatever she was doing. To my delight, I found her in her extra bedroom busily stitching away on a quilt. She handed a threaded needle to me, minus a knot in the end so that I could pretend to quilt without ruining any work she had already done. After pulling a straw-back chair up beside hers next to the quilting frame dominating the room, she then continued to quilt, using old sheets, flour sacks and material scraps from dresses she had sewn herself.

No matter what we were busy doing, we stopped at 7:00 and went into the living room so we could watch, the "Hollywood Palace", which was one of her favorite television shows, along with the "Secret Storm" and the "Edge of Night." Moving our chairs side-by-side in front of the set, Grandmother said we would pretend we were really there in the audience. Grandmother sat and crocheted white doilies as we watched the show.



"Moving our chairs side-by-side in front of the set, Grandmother said we would pretend we were really there in the audience."

Unless Red Skelton was a guest on the Hollywood Palace, I usually could not sit still through the entire show and would seek to amuse myself by searching for new hiding places in her dark house. Grandmother kept the light on only in the room she was in. But as soon as I heard the familiar, orchestrated theme which introduced the "Saturday Night Movie", I quickly resumed

gentleman wearing a shiny tuxedo emerged first and then extended his hand to assist his guest. She was elegant; she wore a long evening dress with a slit in the back, white fur about her shoulders and a sparkling diamond tiara nestled softly in her hair. As they climbed the birthday-cake steps to the theatre, Grandmother and I would laugh at the poor girl who had to wear that same

gathered all of her shoes and neatly lined them along the floor in front of her chair. After asking her exactly what type of shoe she was interested in purchasing, I would commence to "sell" her certain pairs of shoes. Admitting that she was usually a difficult customer to please, Grandmother would buy several pairs while commenting on what a good salesman I was.

"...Grandmother would gently scrape the tar from my feet with her kitchen knife and make me promise not to step in the tar again, even though she knew I would."

my seat in the "audience" waiting anxiously for the couple to arrive at the 20th Century Fox Theatre. A long sleek limousine would slide in next to the curb and stop in front of the endless steps which led to the theatre's entrance. The door of the dark limo opened and a neatly-dressed chauffeur stepped out, walked around the length of the car, and opened the door for the passengers. A

dress every week with the long split in the back. Grandmother even suggested that it was probably the young woman's fault that her dress was torn because it was too tight in the first place.

The movie was always too boring and too long so usually I pleaded with Grandmother to play "shoe store" with me, and she always did. Going from closet to closet, I

Soon tiring of the "shoe store" business, she finally persuaded me to return her shoes to their rightful places. And my final moments of those Saturday nights were spent folded in the gentle arms of my grandmother, who rocked me to sleep while watching the remainder of the Saturday Night Movie.

*She was roughly six feet tall,
and she was made of chrome and plastic
phonograph records and Christmas tree light bulbs. She was*

The Elektrik Maid

By M. Anthony McElroy

For children, life is full of mysteries. I know—I used to be a child myself. There were many things that struck my fancy as I grew up, but perhaps the most enigmatic of them all involved a bakery in my hometown.

I can recall being hustled into the car, bright and early, every Tuesday morning, savoring the oven-like heat the sun had already hidden inside. I loved the sheer force of it, a cross between an obese aunt's bearhug and a blazing bonfire. I sincerely believed that, once or twice, I could see steam roll off my face before I was forced to roll down the window and let the wind rip away the golden pressure.

On these mornings my mother and I would go downtown to do the shopping—that is, my mother would shop, and I would be bodily dragged along. But as the morning decayed slowly into noonday, my pace would quicken and I, not my mother, would be forcefully leading the way. I knew, come noon, we would be going home to cook my father's lunch, and that meant making our final stop...the Elektrik Maid Bakery.

Now that I am a calloused adult, I stand before its dirty, fly-specked windows and feel no great emotion. I do not know whether it has lost some of its grandeur over the years or if the change is purely within me. For, when I was a child, the Elektrik Maid Bakery held one of my life's greatest mysteries. She was, namely, the Elektrik Maid.

I still can see clearly the gold letters on the display window, boldly proclaiming that this was the Elektrik Maid's Bakery. Every Tuesday morning I would stand before the great glass windows, nose against the warm glass, and mouth that mystic, mind-filling phrase, "Elektrik Maid. . .Elektrik Maid. . .Elektrik Maid. . ."

Every Tuesday we would walk through the impossibly heavy glass door, having previously admired the morning's wares through the mile-high display windows. I don't know if the police can identify a criminal by nose-prints, but had I thought of it, I would have been terrified. I can imagine it now. . .a burglary late one night at the Elektrik Maid, no finger prints left anywhere, but the McElroy kid's nose-prints all over the front window. The goodies just drove the poor devil crazy, your honor. Open and shut case. Book him.

Once inside, my mother would skeptically eye the doughnuts, the eclairs, the peanut butter cookies, the brownies, all of the various tooth rotting, waist-exploding goodies. And I, now left to my own devices, would search for the Elektrik Maid.

I never saw her. I knew what she had to look like: she was roughly six feet tall, and she was made of chrome and plastic and phonograph records and Christmas tree light bulbs. I could see her in my mind's eye, back in the rear of the bakery, hidden from public view—the Elektrik Maid in her black and white outfit, baking crazily away at inhuman speed. If it was a good day, I



"I would stand before the great glass windows, nose against the warm glass, and mouth that mystic, mind-filling phrase," Elektrik Maid. . .Elektrik Maid. . .Elektrik Maid. . ."

fancied I could hear the humming of her Elektrik Motor, which sounded an awful lot like the air conditioning outlet. The two were probably close relatives; at the least, they had to be good friends.

A few times, as an oven door was opened or closed, I would catch the flash of light as it was reflected off the stainless steel door and freeze solid. "Here she comes!" my mind would scream breathlessly. "Here comes the Elektrik Maid!" But after a few moments of Zero at the Bone, I would slowly start breathing again and resume my vigil.

Once we entered the bakery when the decrepit saleswoman was nowhere to be seen. I was elated. They had fired the humans at last, and the Elektrik Maid would come out and wait on us. I was seriously deliberating as to whether maids that worked in bakeries carried feather-dusters when movement in the doorway caught my eye. It had to be the Elektrik Maid, her two thirty-watt-bulb eyes blazing, motors humming, and toneless voice demanding, "May I help you please. . .may I help you please. . ."

An instant later the ancient saleswoman tottered in, bearing scars from her many fights as a young girl against local dinosaurs and cavemen. The scars wriggled as she smiled. She took our order; we watched summer turn to autumn, then deep winter as she shuffled to the proper cases, packaged our sweets, and rang up our purchase. Her

rheumy eyes would vanish, stolen by crow's feet, as she cheerfully bid us good-bye.

There were a few other incidents like these, and each time I felt that I came a little closer to actually meeting the Elektrik Maid. I could feel the Elektrik Maid's presence just beyond the wall. I knew that she was real—real as Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny or The Things That Were In My Closet Last Night. She was real.

Downtown has changed now. My mother and I used to fight crowds to get to sales at Woolworth's or Davey's Five and Ten. Now the streets are deserted except for lanky black youths carrying eighty-pound stereos on their shoulders, from which heavily-drugged singers scream that their "Baby is the Funkiest." Woolworth's closed when I was twelve. Davey's Five and Ten had boards over the windows to keep in the dark.

The Elektrik Maid Bakery is still there. I stumbled on it the other day when I was visiting a bookstore. A dead fly lay on an upper tier of a dry, long-petrified wedding cake; the tiny bride and groom were most distressed. One of the peanut butter cookies was broken in half, and something black was embedded in the center. The brownies were white around the edges.

Not daring to hope, I entered quietly, noting with some surprise that the door was quite easily opened. I looked carefully at the display cases and saw nothing appealing. I almost screamed when there was

movement from the inner door.

It was only the old woman—the same old woman—who had been behind the counter years before. She did not recognize me.

Same business, same lady, same displays, probably the same food, but the bakery was different. I knew why. I heard no sinister humming from the rear of the store. I saw no flashes of light on chrome. I did not hear motors or gears or lights buzzing deep in Elektrik Eyesockets. The Elektrik Maid was gone.

I bought three brownies I never ate, and I left. The old woman stared quizzically when I stopped in front of the store again, transfixed before the windows. I closed my eyes.

It was almost noon downtown. The sun was warm and felt much like a cross between an obese aunt's bearhug and a blazing bonfire. Around me, the sounds of crowds faded in; women, children, babies, people fighting to get to a sale at Woolworth's. The gentle air carried the scent of my mother's perfume.

And there, before the mile-high windows, I heard a familiar, low-pitched hum from within the store. Through closed eyelids I saw a flash of light on chrome.

Just as my childhood memory demands that my face really could steam in a hot, hot car, I must believe that she, if only for a moment, was there. The Elektrik Maid was there.

A funny, sad little smile on my face, I walked away.

About the Writers

Kimra Traynor now resides in Jacksonville and is a senior year English major.

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Amy Bliss Mason is an English major from Anniston . She is currently finishing her sophomore year.

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